Claims

1. A data classification method comprising the steps of:
defining a plurality of hierarchical indices;
storing data in a database in a memory; and,
linking the stored data in the database to applicable ones of the indices in dependence on characteristics of the data, the link being with a lowest applicable entry within the hierarchical indices.

2. A data classification method according to claim 1, in which each index is a hierarchy of categories and sub-categories.

3. A data classification method according to claim 1, in which the stored data comprises references to electronic data, the reference including a network identifier for accessing the data.

4. A data classification method according to claim 3, in which the electronic data comprises World Wide Web pages and the reference to the data includes the Web page's Universal Resource Locator, URL.

5. A data classification data structure comprising a database of data items in a memory and a plurality of indices having a hierarchy of entries, each data item being linked to the lowest applicable entry within applicable ones of the indices in dependence on characteristics of the data.

6. A data classification data structure according to claim 5, in which each index is a hierarchy of categories and sub-categories.

7. A data classification data structure according to claim 6, including indices corresponding to categories selected from: data subject; content language; data format; and, location associated with the data item.

8. A data classification data structure according to claim 5, in which the stored data comprises references to electronic data, the reference including a network identifier for accessing the data.

9. A data classification data structure according to claim 8, in which the electronic data comprises World Wide Web pages and the reference to the data includes the Web page's Universal Resource Locator, URL.

10. A computer implemented search engine comprising a server arranged to access a data classification data structure in accordance with claim 5, the server being operative to accept settings for a number of the indices and a search term, wherein the server is arranged to access the data classification structure to generate a set of data references from those in the data classification structure in dependence on the settings of the indices and to execute a search using the search term on the set of data references.

11. A computer implemented search engine according to claim 10, in which the server is arranged to generate the set of data references by determining the intersection of data references associated with each index entry corresponding to its respective index setting.

12. A computer implemented search engine according to claim 11, in which the server is arranged to generate the set of data references by determining the intersection of data references associated with each index entry, or being a child of that index entry, corresponding to its respective index setting.

13. A computer implemented search engine according to claim 10, in which the server is arranged to generate the set of data references by determining the union of data references associated with each index entry corresponding to its respective index setting.

14. A computer implemented search engine according to claim 13, in which the server is arranged to generate the set of data references by determining the union of

data references associated with each index entry, or being a child of that index entry, corresponding to its respective index setting.

15. A computer implemented search engine according to claim 10, in which the server is arranged to host a World Wide Web site on the Internet, the World Wide Web site including an interface operative to accept the settings for a number of the indices and the search term, wherein the server is arranged to output the data references as a World Wide Web page.

16. A computer implemented data access system comprising a server arranged to access a data classification structure in accordance with claim 5, the server being operative to accept settings for a number of the indices, wherein the server is arranged to output data references from the data classification structure in dependence on the settings of the indices.

17. A computer implemented data access system according to claim 16, in which the server is arranged to generate the set of data references by determining the intersection of data references associated with each index entry corresponding to its respective index setting.

18. A computer implemented data access system according to claim 17, in which the server is arranged to generate the set of data references by determining the intersection of data references associated with each index entry, or being a child of that index entry, corresponding to its respective index setting.

19. A computer implemented data access system according to claim 16, in which the server is arranged to generate the set of data references by determining the union of data references associated with each index entry corresponding to its respective index setting.

20. A computer implemented data access system according to claim 19, in which the server is arranged to generate the set of data references by determining the union of data references associated with each index entry, or being a child of that index entry, corresponding to its respective index setting.

21. A computer implemented data access system according to claim 16, in which the server is arranged to host a World Wide Web site on the Internet, the World Wide Web site including an interface operative to accept the settings for a number of the indices, wherein the server is arranged to output the data references as a World Wide Web page.

22. An intermediate data serving system linkable to a data access system and having data stored in a data classification structure in accordance with claim 5, wherein upon being accessed by said link, the system is operative to determine characteristics of the data access system and to output selected ones of said data associated with index entries determined as being relevant to said characteristics.

23. An intermediate data serving system according to claim 22, in which characteristics of the data access system include selected ones of: the subject of the data access system; the subject of the data accessed in the data access system prior to accessing of the link; and, a location associated with the data accessed in the data access system.

24. An intermediate data serving system according to claim 22, in which the data comprises references to electronic data, each reference including a network identifier for accessing the electronic data.

25. A data classification data structure according to claim 24, in which the electronic data comprises World Wide Web pages and the reference to the data includes the Web page's Universal Resource Locator, URL.

26. A method of classifying pages of a Web site to portions of a hierarchical data structure of categories and sub-categories corresponding to said hierarchy, the method comprising the steps of:

traversing the Web site;

recording characteristics of associations between pages of the Web site;

comparing the recorded characteristics with the hierarchical data structure, wherein if a predetermined number of the recorded characteristics for a page and associated

pages match a portion of the hierarchical data structure, the page is classified against the portion of the hierarchical data structure.

27. A method according to claim 26, in which associations comprise hypertext links and the characteristics include the text associated with the hypertext links.

28. A method according to claim 26, in which the comparison is made in dependence on all surrounding pages.

29. A method according to claim 26, applied to the data classification data structure of claim 5, in which the comparison is against each index, wherein if a page is classified against an index, a reference to the page is generated and stored and linked to the index entry corresponding to the portion of the hierarchical data structure.